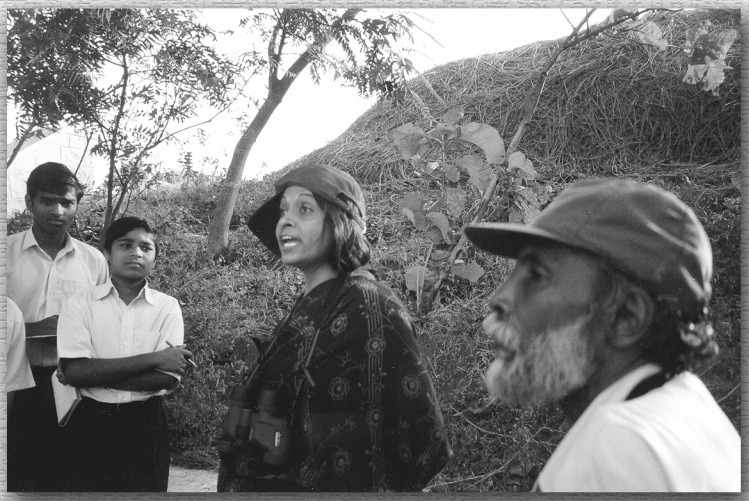
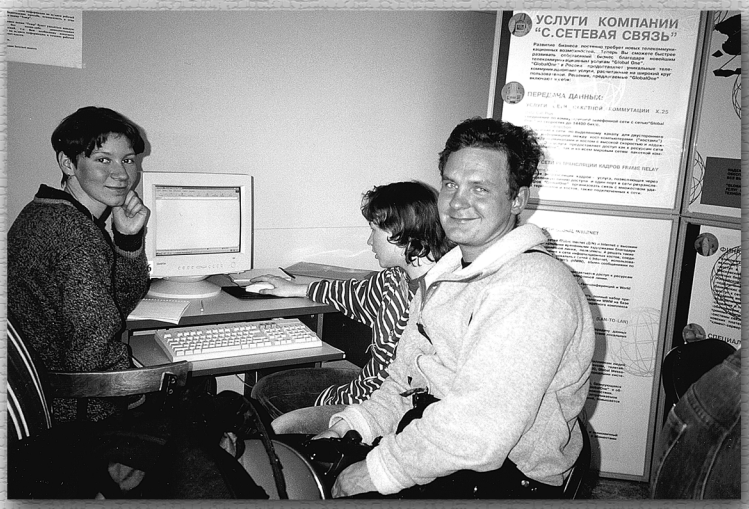
U.S. Fish & Wildlife Service

Wildlife Without Borders

Division of International Conservation
2001





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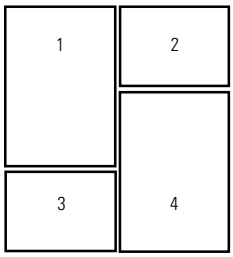

1. Female and young Western Lowland Gorillas, in Nouabale-Ndoki National Park, Congo

© Richard Ruggiero

2. Community members in south India learn about their local wildlife and wetland ecosystems.

USFWS/Marti Doggett

3. Ornithological seminar participants in Yuzhno-Sakhalinsk, Russia.

USFWS/Heather Johnson

4. Osprey—a neotropical migratory bird.

USFWS/Greg Gentry

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Migrating shorebirds
USFWS/Hollingsworth

Reflections

On July 21, 2000, the Neotropical Migratory Bird Conservation Act (Act) was signed into law. The Act emphasizes partnerships and helps in achieving integrated and coordinated bird conservation, both nationally and internationally. It has the potential to serve as a central element of the North American Bird Conservation Initiative by helping to reach national and international goals identified in national migratory bird conservation plans.

The purposes of the Act are to perpetuate healthy populations of neotropical migratory birds; assist in the conservation of these birds by supporting conservation initiatives in the United States, Latin America, and the Caribbean; and provide financial resources and foster international cooperation for neotropical migratory birds. Many of us are becoming increasingly aware that the conservation concerns and threats to neotropical migratory birds south of the U.S. border are of greater magnitude than previously believed. Recognizing this, the Act specifies that 75 percent of the funds appropriated be used abroad.

Getting the Act passed was a huge step forward for all of us involved in neotropical migratory bird conservation. On-the-ground conservation efforts for landbirds, shorebirds, waterfowl, seabirds and other waterbirds, including their habitats, will be implemented under the Act. Grants will be distributed through a competitive process, and an advisory group will assist in guiding the initiative. Projects will span the entire spectrum of environmental conservation, including management, research, education, habitat restoration, and law enforcement.

Neotropical migratory bird species provide invaluable environmental, economic, recreational and aesthetic benefits to everyone in the Western Hemisphere. Collaboration with conservationists throughout this hemisphere to achieve joint neotropical migratory bird conservation goals is the key. We hope you will join the Service in our efforts to implement the Act and begin developing new and exciting projects for neotropical migratory bird conservation.

Herb Raffaele, Chief
Division of International Conservation

Laurie Hunter

Helping Osprey Win Battle Over Fish

Eating fish isn't always good for you, especially if you are an osprey. Osprey are highly specialized fish predators. With their legs, feet, wings, and plumage adapted to capturing live fish near the water's surface, ospreys are the preeminent fishermen of the bird world. These neotropical migrants spend a large part of each year, and most of the first 1½ years of their lives, south of the U.S. border. Problems arise when osprey focus on obtaining their meals at fish farms in Latin America and the Caribbean, rather than feeding in their natural hunting grounds on the coast and along river valleys. Fish farmers, in frustration, shoot the osprey.

Raptor Biologists work with Fish Farmers to Develop a Solution

The number of birds killed each year is unknown. In a study supported by the Service's Winged Ambassadors program, a team of local biologists interviewed fish farmers in Colombia to determine the extent of bird mortality there. Preliminary data suggest that a few thousand ospreys are killed annually, but the numbers may be much higher. When you consider that Colombia is only one of many countries rapidly expanding their fish-farming industry—Brazil, Peru, and Venezuela also have growing industries—the number may be staggeringly high.

Winged Ambassadors is mounting a full-scale effort to accurately assess annual mortality. A conference will be held to bring together Service-trained specialists from Latin America and the Caribbean to learn the survey methods used in Colombia and to conduct similar surveys in their own countries. Surveys will also be carried out over a much broader area in Colombia and several farms will be selected to determine the efficacy of non-lethal deterrents such as aerial wires and nets surrounding the fish ponds.

The osprey story underscores the challenge of conserving migratory birds. Not long ago, osprey populations in the U.S. were plummeting due to DDT poisoning and egg-shell thinning. After DDT was banned in the early 70's, the population slowly recovered. However, this new threat from fish farms means that ospreys are not yet out of danger. Only international efforts among collaborating nations can bring long-lasting success.

USFWS/Donald J. Voros

New Conservation Act for Great Apes

Heather Johnson

The Service implements several Multinational Species Conservation Acts to conserve a variety of wildlife species throughout the world. These Acts establish conservation funds for on-the-ground projects pertaining to Asian and African elephants, rhinoceroses, and tigers. All were enacted by the U.S. Congress to assist range countries with local conservation efforts to save these particularly vulnerable and declining species and their habitats.

In 2000, Congress passed the Great Ape Conservation Act. This Act established the Great Ape Conservation Fund (Fund) to assist with the conservation of five groups of primates: gorillas, chimpanzees, bonobos, orangutans, and gibbons. In fiscal year 2001, Congress appropriated $748,000 to conserve these species. These funds provide numerous opportunities to develop partnerships with natural resource agencies, academic institutions, local community groups, government and non-government entities, and individuals committed to partnering for the benefit of conserving the world's remaining great apes in Asia and Africa.

One of the first grants awarded under the Fund will be to conduct an environmental education program in Gunung Palung National Park in Indonesia. Students, teachers, community members, and government staff will be educated on wildlife activities within the Park. Most importantly, participants will learn about the threats to orangutans and how they can help reduce the threats.

Another project will support a ranger-based monitoring program for mountain gorillas in protected areas of the Virunga-Bwindi and Forest Ecosystem, in Uganda, Rwanda, and the Democratic Republic of Congo. The Virunga-Bwindi Forest Ecosystem is the only range of the mountain gorilla (Gorilla berengei), of which approximately 650 individuals remain. The grant, which addresses urgent conservation needs of the mountain gorilla, is essential for management of this endangered species.

Finally, a grant for bonobos was awarded to equip and train ecoguards from the Insitut Congolais pur la Conservation de la Nature (ICCN). The range of the bonobo, the closest relative to humans, is restricted to the area in and around the Salonga National Park. This grant will help protect this vital area, in which lies the only hope for survival of this species in the wild.

Through the Fund, the Service plans to work closely with its new collaborators to plan, implement and evaluate strategies designed to reverse the serious downward trends of these vulnerable species.

Mother orangutan with baby and juvenile in local habitat.

The Fund's first call for proposals attracted more than 50 proposals from African, Asian, and international conservation organizations. These proposals address research, management, conflict resolution, community outreach, education, law enforcement, and local and national capacity building.

David Ferguson

Tropical Wetlands Benefit from Creative Partnership in India

In South India, near the extreme southern tip of the peninsula, in a land as ancient as time itself, the primary use of the area continues to be for agriculture. The fortunes of this agriculture, and thus the survival of the people that live there ride on the bounty of the southwest and northeast monsoonal rains that come during June to September and October to December respectively. Over the years, these rains have also created more than 2000 small and large water bodies in the lowland plains of Kanyakumari District. Sustained for centuries by the tropical forests of the southern end of the Western Ghats, these fresh-water wetlands have been exploited by local farmers as irrigation reservoirs.

Today, as everywhere else in India, the needs of nearly one-billion people are rapidly converting the face of the land. Sometimes it is difficult to remember what the land looked like in the Kanyakumari District during one person's lifetime, before roads, bus stops, sports fields and other development eliminated the natural habitat. Destruction of the wetlands occurs before local people realize the indispensability of such systems. Adjacent to the Suchindram Kulam wetlands is the rapidly expanding city of Nagercoil. The city uses the wetlands as convenient sumps for water-borne wastes, causing rapid eutrification and decay. Fast-financial-return crops such as coconuts are planted in and around the water reservoirs, thus reducing their capacity to sustain the back-bone of the region's agriculture—rice cultivation.

Flooded rice paddies and coconut palms — beneficiaries of wetland system in Kanyakumari District, South India.
USFWS/Dave Ferguson

However, a small non-governmental organization with a bold plan and an auspicious name, the Institute For Restoration of Natural Environment (IRNE), came into being in 1993. Based in Nagercoil, IRNE was founded by a handful of deeply concerned individuals from India and abroad to address the deterioration and shrinkage of the natural environment in the Kanyakumari District. Some of these were former officials of the Bombay Natural History Society, in partnership with the Service since the late 1970s. The Service extended its support to help IRNE get started. Service personnel visited the Kanyakumari region, helped formulate research studies and recommendations, made presentations to local schools and community groups, donated books and publications, and exchanged technical information. This support helped IRNE gain international attention, as well as a grant from the U.S. Biodiversity Support Program in 1993 to help promote agriculture, fishing and ecotourism for the Suchindram Kulam wetlands.

Initially some of the local fisherfolk and agriculturists feared these conservation actions might restrain fishing activities and that birds would destroy their crops. However, universities used local television, field demonstrations, press interviews, and community lectures to promote conservation awareness, thus making it possible to engage a large number of people in wetlands conservation. The State Forest Department, District Collectors and various government agencies such as the Public Works Department, village Panchayats (an institution of self-government) and others have supported the conservation efforts. Today, the Service continues its relationship with IRNE as partners in a new 3-year project for additional work on conservation and restoration of the area's biodiversity.

First International Ornithological Seminar on Sakhalin Island

Heather Johnson

In April 2000, during the First International Ornithological Seminar on the island of Sakhalin, Russia, I taught local educators about seabird and shorebird ecology. Funding for the seminar was provided by the Service's Wildlife Without Borders - Russia initiative. Other seminar sponsors included the State Committee of Environmental Protection of the Sakhalin Region, Sakhalin Energy and the Northern Forum.

Because the U.S. and Russia have shared species and shared waters between Alaska and the Russian Far East, this type of training opportunity is invaluable to the overall conservation of migratory birds and their habitats. For example, several priority shorebird species identified in the Alaska Shorebird Conservation Plan travel along the East Asian or Australasian Flyways during their spring and fall migrations. Examples of some of these migrants include dunlin, bar-tailed godwit, wandering tattler, and bristle-thighed curlew.

Thirty-two participants came to the seminar from several communities on Sakhalin Island, located in the Russian Far East, just north of Hokkaido, Japan. They included educators and outreach specialists from schools, nature reserves, and other organizations, as well as two Peace Corps volunteers. Participants learned how to use the "Learn About Seabirds" and "Arctic-Nesting Shorebirds" curricula and how to become involved in the Shorebird Sister Schools Program. They also learned about seabird and shorebird life history, migration, and the potential threats to birds and their habitats. Participants received classroom and field instruction, as well as a World Wide Web computer training session.

The exchange of information through the Shorebird Sister Schools Program, educational training opportunities along the flyway, and collaboration of research techniques and results are critical in reaching the Service's migratory bird conservation goals in the future. Future involvement with participants on Sakhalin Island include pen pal exchanges with Shorebird Sister Schools in Alaska and other parts of the flyway; collaboration of seabird and shorebird research through exchanges of scientists and information; and the potential for student and teacher exchanges between village community members in Russian nature reserves (zapovedniks) on Sakhalin Island and National Wildlife Refuges in Alaska.

Svetlana Fatikhova and Vladimir Zykov/USFWS Heather Johnson

Working Internationally to Further the Service Mission

The Service has a long history of cooperation in international conservation activities, first with Canada and Mexico early in the 20th century and extending to the far reaches of the globe at the start of the 21st century. During 2000, Service staff and Service-sponsored travelers worked in 41 nations to provide training; attend bilateral and multilateral meetings; review Service-funded projects and activities; and to cooperate with Mexico and Canada on conservation efforts along our borders.

Biologists, managers, and training specialists from several Service regions traveled to Latin America and the Caribbean to assist communities with environmental education programs, research, training, and restoration projects. Through the Service's Wildlife Without Borders - Latin America and Caribbean initiative, programs such as the Centers of Excellence, Winged Ambassadors, Green Diamonds, Back from the Brink, Conservation through Pride, and Wildlife Without Borders - Wetlands assist communities with priority issues in migratory bird conservation, habitat restoration and enhancement, and endangered species issues, respectively.

Service biologists regularly share data and perform joint field work with Russian colleagues to fulfill management obligations for migratory birds, fish, walrus, polar bears, and other species under the Wildlife Without Borders - Russia initiative. Also, Service National Wildlife Refuge Managers share ideas and techniques with managers of parks and reserves in Russia.

Through the Multinational Species Conservation Act Funds and the Wildlife Without Borders - India initiative, Service staff have assisted many African and Asian Nations with training and assistance in field research methods; forest and wetland management and ecology; geographic information systems; environmental education and outreach; park ranger interpretation and law enforcement; and other conservation practices.

Numerous Service international projects and activities have provided U.S. scientists, managers, and ecologists, with opportunities to develop new skills and expanded their own conservation knowledge. In addition, these international efforts have furthered the Service mission while also benefitting the wildlife agencies in these partner countries.

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